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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002695

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S JUNE 30 MEETING WITH ISRAELI PUBLIC SECURITY MINISTER DICHTER

REF: TEL AVIV 2622 - NOTAL

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones. Reasons: 1.4 (b, d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Israeli Public Security Minister and former Shin Bet Chief Avi Dichter told the Ambassador June 30 that after Palestinian militants kidnapped an Israeli soldier on June 25, Israel understood that its policy of not targeting Hamas had been a mistake and that Israel must now draw its "red lines" so that Hamas understands what Israel can not tolerate. Dichter also discussed the Gaza crossings, explaining which Israeli agencies have authority over the crossings and saying that while Israel wants to keep transit points open, it would not do so if it threatens Israeli lives. Dichter and the Ambassador discussed potential measures to improve security at the crossings -- including the creation of a buffer zone between the Palestinian and Israeli sides -- and pledged to work with United States Security Coordinator (USSC) LTG Dayton. Finally, Dichter and the Ambassador touched on corruption at Karni, the state of Israel's Arab community, and sharing fingerprint data on terrorism suspects. END SUMMARY.

OPERATION SUMMER RAINS: DRAWING RED LINES

¶12. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question about Israel's ongoing operations in the Gaza Strip following persistent Qassam rocket attacks, the killing of two Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers, and the kidnapping of another on June 25, Dichter explained that Israel realizes it had been a mistake to not target Hamas earlier given that the terror organization has assisted or blessed other factions' attacks on Israel. "Deterrence didn't work. Hamas does not know what our red lines are; we are now drawing them," he continued. Dichter said that jailing Hamas members helps make Israel's red lines clear and that Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, whom he claimed had been deeply involved in terror activities as an aide to former Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, would have a file of charges awaiting him if Israel decided to arrest him. Dichter then provided an assessment of Hamas's strength in Gaza and the West Bank. He explained that Hamas has remained strong in the Gaza Strip because Israel had largely remained outside Palestinian areas there since 1994. In the West Bank, however, Israel since 2002 has penetrated camps, villages and cities, and has gleaned valuable information from terrorists that Israeli forces had arrested. Israel, in Dichter's assessment, "badly destroyed" Hamas cells in the West Bank, which he said at one time had been responsible for 90 percent of Israeli casualties.

CROSSINGS SHOULD BE OPEN, BUT
NOT IF IT PUTS ISRAELIS AT RISK

¶13. (C) The Ambassador told Dichter that the USG is working hard to keep crossings open, noting that the USG assesses that terrorists are targeting the crossings as a way to undermine contacts between Israel and the Palestinians. He mentioned that USSC Dayton is working with USAID, the Palestinians and the IDF to improve crossing designs and systems, and to improve training for security personnel. The Ambassador then asked Dichter for clarification on which GOI agency is responsible for Karni. Dichter, drawing on a notepad, explained that the IDF is responsible for the perimeter surrounding the Karni crossing. Once individuals or goods enter the crossing, however, the Israeli Airport Authority (IAA) -- under the Transportation Ministry -- is responsible. The Israeli National Police (INP), which Dichter's Public Security Ministry oversees, provide the IAA with overall guidance and direction, and order it to take specific measures in response to terror alerts. Dichter stressed to the Ambassador that terrorist threats are not abstract, and he related several terrorist incidents involving the crossing in recent years. He acknowledged that the crossings need to be open, but not when doing so puts Israelis in jeopardy. According to Dichter, Israel takes substantial risks in opening the crossings. He cited as evidence the GOI's decision to open the crossings on June 25, despite specific warnings -- which turned out to be accurate -- that terrorists would attack either Kerem Shalom or Karni.

14. (C) Dichter and the Ambassador also discussed ways that Israel could improve security at the crossings. The Ambassador urged Israel to use the scanning equipment that the USG has provided for the crossings. Dichter, not directly addressing the Ambassador's request, suggested that security at the crossings could be improved if trusted and experienced third parties could search individuals and containers on the Palestinian side of the crossings and then allow cleared individuals and containers to proceed into a sealed-off "buffer zone" between the two sides before entering the Israeli side of the crossing. The Ambassador told Dichter that he would recommend to USSC Dayton that he meet with Dichter to discuss such ideas further.

CORRUPTION AT KARNI

15. (C) The Ambassador told Dichter that U.S. companies have complained to USG officials that both Palestinian and Israeli officials have been extracting bribes as a requirement for getting trucks in the queue to transit the crossing. Dichter responded that such corrupt practices could be related to organized crime and that he would welcome additional information the USG could pass to the INP. He mentioned that one "mafia" kingpin of southern Israel recently had been arrested and intimated that this may have a positive impact at Karni. The Ambassador suggested that a more formal and transparent system for queuing shipments through the crossing in both directions might alleviate the problem.

ARAB ISRAELIS "A POTENTIAL ASSET," BUT TRENDS ARE TROUBLING

16. (C) Dichter, who had just come from a meeting with Arab-Israeli Kadima party members, shared his views regarding trends in the Arab-Israeli community. The Ambassador said that the Arab community in Israel represents a potential asset for Israel in the broader Middle East. Dichter said two segments of the Arab community seek separation -- the Islamist groups represented by Raad Salah of the Northern Islamic Movement and the nationalist groups represented by MK Azmi Bishara of the Balad Party. Dichter said he tried to convince the Arab sector that they have not benefited from their efforts to remain separate from other Israelis. According to Dichter, the Arab sector had not developed as rapidly as the Jewish sector, and has remained "fully dependent" on the Jewish economy: "They have no entrepreneurs, no hi-tech, no real factories." Dichter added that this characterization also applied to the economies of the West Bank and Gaza.

SHARING FINGERPRINT DATA

17. (C) The Ambassador concluded the meeting by inquiring about the status of an initiative in which the GOI and the USG would share terrorism suspects' fingerprint data. The issue had been raised with Dichter by U.S. Attorney General Gonzales in an earlier meeting (reftel). The Ambassador asked Dichter whether his agency plans to allocate the funds required to upgrade Israel's system to facilitate the exchange of data. Dichter replied that if the U.S. system is more developed than Israel's then it would make sense for Israel to improve its technology. He said that there still may be legal issues related to sharing data, but that his office would look into them, as well as look into the possibility of allocating funds for the upgrade, and will provide the Ambassador with a response. As an aside, Dichter noted that the Israeli National Police increasingly deeply involved with biometrics, particularly for foreign workers in Israel.

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JONES